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**Robertson,
J. Ross**

**How the First
Presbyterian
Church in Miami
was built**

Miami, Fla.

1909

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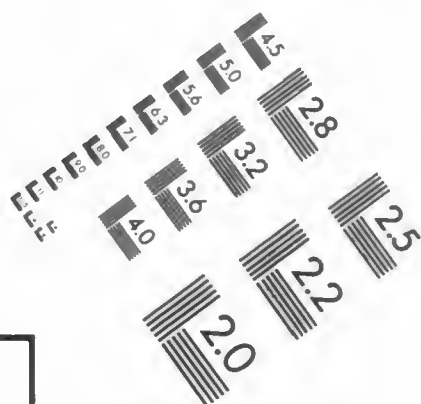
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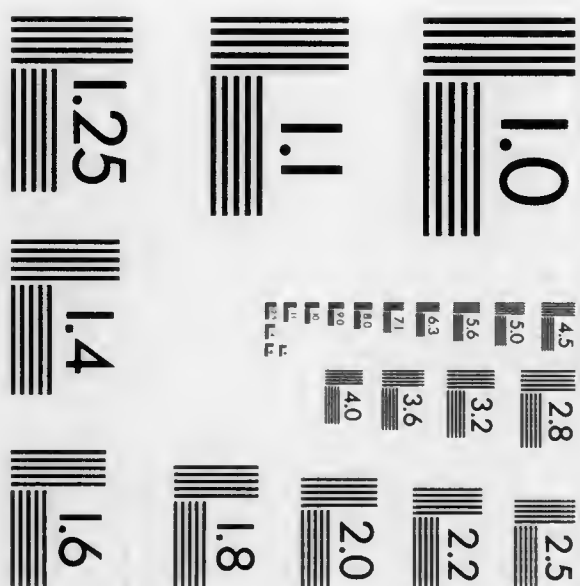


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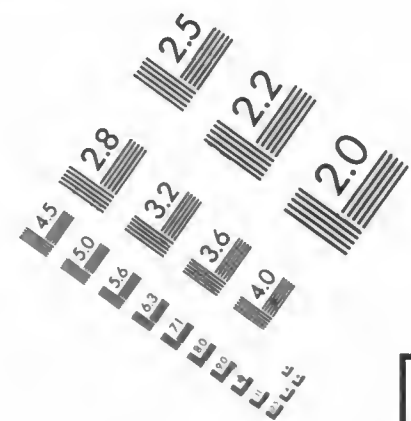
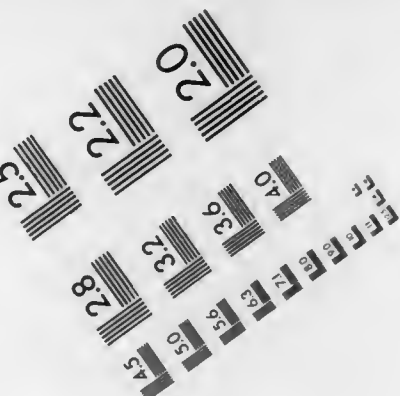
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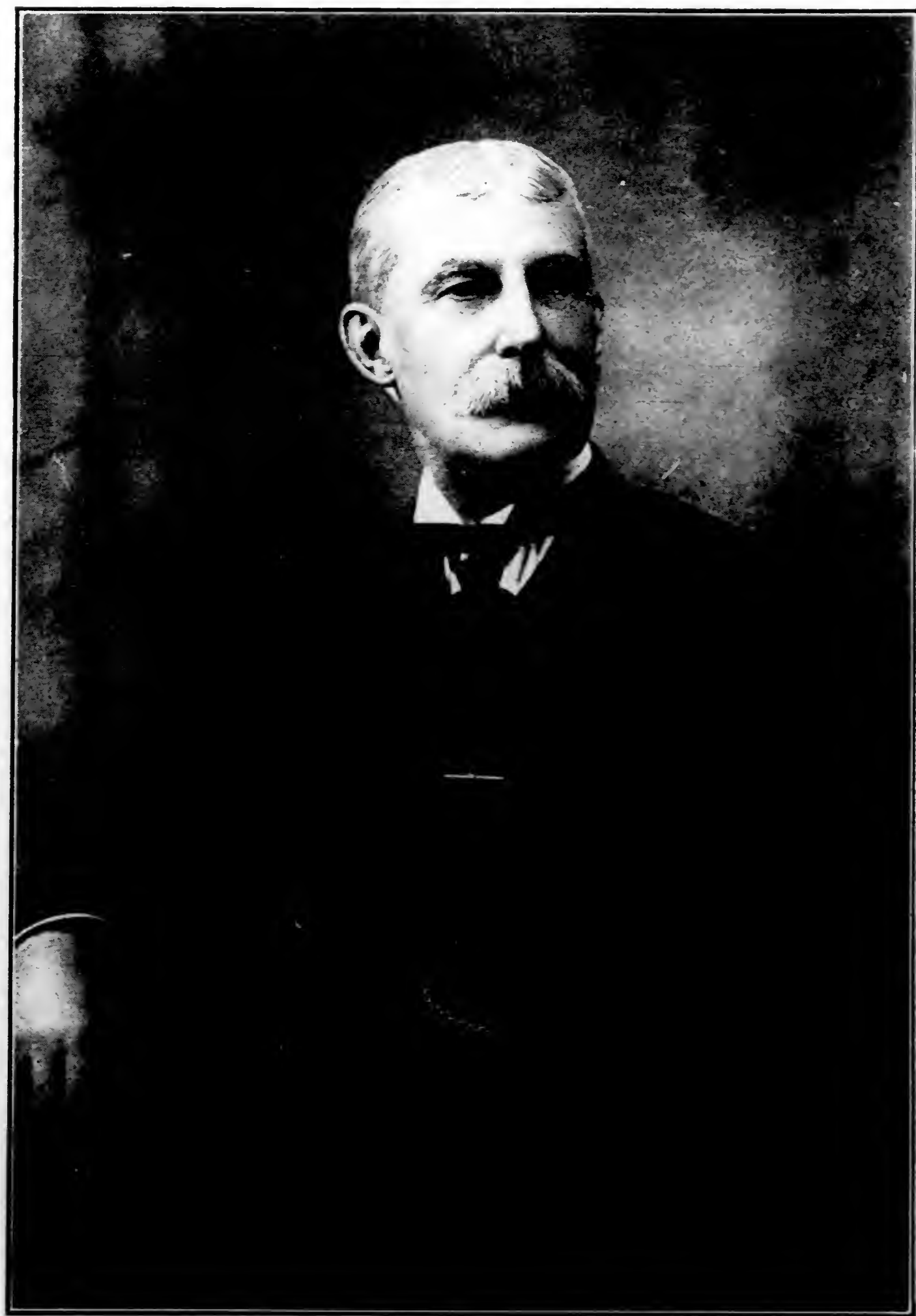
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How the First
Presbyterian
Church in....
Miami, Florida
Was Built.....





H. M. FLAGLER. MIAMI, FLORIDA.

HOW THE FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN MIAMI WAS BUILT.

By J. ROSS ROBERTSON, Toronto Evening Telegram.

IT is March in Miami, but here the chilling frosts of the north, the sky with snow clouds flitting, are unknown, for Florida is truly the summer land of the winter time in its bloom of flowers and roses red.

Florida may not be Paradise regained, but it is surely in its summer glow the garden spot of the earth.

It is the land of eternal summer with sky blue and air pure, a land where the flowers bloom while the grip of the wild old frost-king is firm in the great northlands of Canada.

Miami is an active business centre. Its growth has been wonderful and its progress continuous. Sixteen years ago the site of the city was just a waste of sand covered with jungle.

There was certainly nothing doing in this far south region during those days. The railroad found its way to Lake Worth, sixty miles north of here in 1893. This led to the beginning of the "Magic City," as it is appropriately called. A Mrs. Tuttle owned all the land, some seven or eight hundred acres—it was sand—plain every day sand—a Sahara on the shores of Biscayne Bay. The Bay is just a stretch of shallow water that opens into the Atlantic Ocean. Seeing that the railroad was at Lake Worth, Mrs. Tuttle made a proposal to Henry M. Flagler, the great developer of Florida, in 1895. I understand that she offered every other lot in the proposed city to Mr. Flagler in consideration of his building a railroad south to Miami. He accepted the offer. It was a good thing for Mr. Flagler and was a wise move on the part of Mrs. Tuttle.

Miami is perhaps the only example on record of a place becoming a city without matriculating as a town.

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for in July, 1896, three months after the first sound of the locomotive whistle was heard in Miami, the place was incorporated under the laws of Florida.

Miami simply sprung out of the wilderness and became the busy home of men who never looked back when they started in to found the city.

In those days the population of the place could almost be counted on the fingers of both hands. There was not a score of residents in the dozen shacks that formed what is now the city. These shacks represented the efforts of the pioneer architects who managed to get along without plans, designs or specifications so that they were not troubled with architects' certificates.

To-day all is changed. The city proper, with its seven thousand inhabitants, has its well laid out streets, its shops and stores, all full of commercial activities, while many of the large buildings would be a credit to a northern metropolis. In the residential districts each dwelling, as a general rule, stands in its own grounds, amid an ocean of color. Nearly every dwelling in the best part of the city faces on lawns carpeted with flowers.

As I write, I am seated on a broad colonnade extending some six hundred feet around three sides of the Royal Palm, a palatial hotel, fronted on its south side with a tropical garden enriched with plants and shrubs and trees, native and otherwise, rare and beautiful.

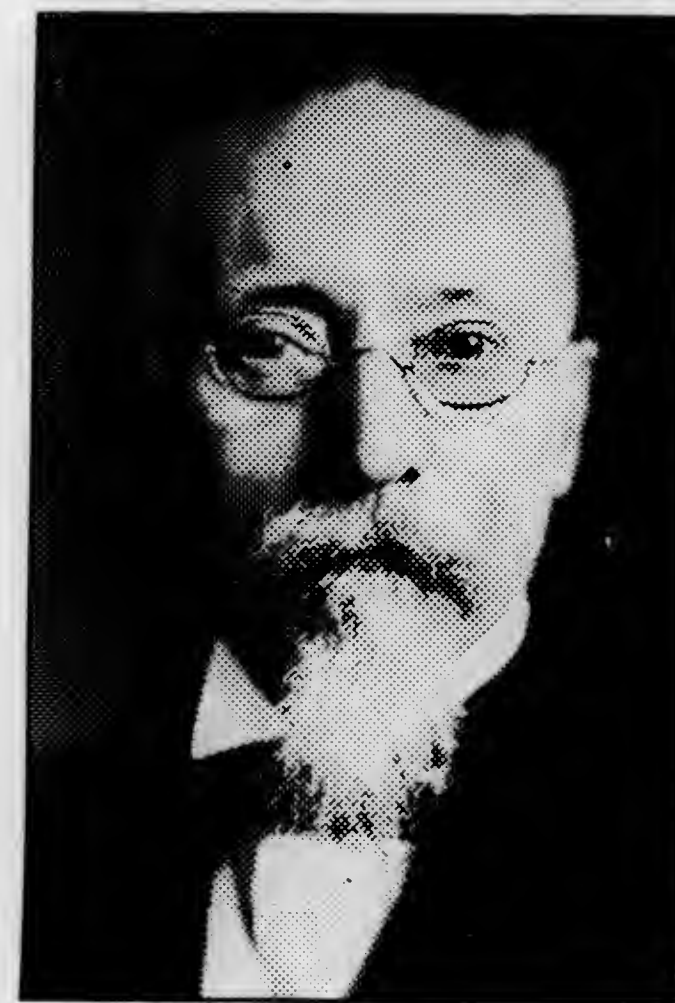
Yonder are the date, the royal, the fishtail and the cocoanut palms swaying in the breeze amid the beds of flowers edged with phlox, the little white flower with tiny leaves of white or red or blue, and a scent in every flower, while other beds are bordered with alyssum. Yes, within sight one sees the night blooming jessamine with its delicate greenish white flower. Then roses in full bloom in every hue, red as the royal robes, white as the driven snow, or yellow as our lily of the Boyne. Near by are American Beauties, just a few, so sweet and yet so frail, not nearly so hardy as their sisters of the northern clime.

Then the winding walks of this garden of beauty, lined with hedges of hibiscus, the famous red flower that is one of the glories of this State. It is an ever blooming plant with leaves, not unlike in shape our holly-hocks, with buds that open and blossom for but a couple of days, followed by new buds that keep the tree in continuous color, for the new buds quickly form. Then

rare trees like the silk cotton tree, with its red blooms like the hibiscus, while near by is the Otaheite apple tree with white blooms. This tree yields its fruit in clusters with a taste not unlike that of a pineapple.

Fifteen years ago these acres were thickly covered with wild shrubs, wild lemons, wild limes, a jungle forbidding and impassable. To-day this spot is a picture of flowerland in color and the home of the orange blossoms that are so loved by our northern brides.

But I did not sharpen my pencil and take my note book in hand to tell you about the beauty of this place



REV. W. W. FARIS, D.D.,
Pastor of First Presbyterian Church, Miami.

or its commercial or tourist life, but rather to say a word about the pioneer days of the church in Miami, when this part of God's vineyard—if a great stretch of sand can be so called—was not blessed with many, who, like my Scottish ancestors, with Calvin and Knox as examples, preached the pure and unalloyed Gospel in the conventicles of the hillside and by the shores of the ocean in the heather-clad land across the sea.

Yes, where the clansmen, the Lowlanders, and women

and their bairns were content to get near to God through the simple truths of the Gospel message, and so lay the foundation of a church that towers to heaven in the soundness of its faith and the simplicity of its worship.

Everything has a beginning, and Presbyterianism in Miami had its beginnings, its early struggles, but the zealous work of one true disciple of the faith of our fathers has given it a front place in the ranks of denominational work in Florida.

The popular preacher of Miami to-day is the Rev. W. W. Faris, D.D., the pastor of the First Presbyterian Church.

Skilled with tongue and pen, he is a power for good in this new found city, and for his earnest endeavors to instruct and inspire his people with Gospel teachings, he is loved by his congregation and has the sincere respect of not only those who expound the Scriptures in other pulpits, but of the people of this place and of this great south State.

He has a large congregation, and in the tourist season, from December to March, every pew is filled by attentive listeners, and often there is scarcely standing room in the church on the Sabbath.

Dr. Faris came from the north. He was born in the State of Ohio, in Barlow, near Marietta, and is a son of the late Rev. J. M. Faris, at one time financial agent of the McCormick Seminary in Chicago.

Two years after receiving his primary education Dr. Faris was a student in Washington College, now Washington and Jefferson College, Pennsylvania. He received his degree of B.A. in old Chicago University, the institution that preceded the Chicago University in 1866, and took his theological course at McCormick Seminary in Chicago.

In 1885 Dr. Faris, noted for his scholastic attainments, received the degree of D.D., in Blackburn College, Carlinville, Illinois, and later on he was honored by a request to accept the presidency of the college. Owing to other engagements he was compelled to decline this offer.

Dr. Faris has had quite a varied experience. Trained for the ministry, he has followed side lines in journalism. He edited the "Occident," a religious periodical in San Francisco, for a couple of years, and was subsequently assistant editor of "The Northwest," Minneapolis, a Presbyterian religious paper, during part of that period.



FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, MIAMI.

In 1894-5 he was also editor of the "Reveille," a Christian Endeavor paper of Pittsburg. This was his last work in the editorial chair.

Of his family of four boys and six girls—ten in all—three boys and two girls were interested in "the art preservative of all arts," for each of them could stand at the case and handle a composing stick, as they did in his office in Anna, Illinois.

As pastor he occupied the pulpit of the Hazelwood Presbyterian Church in Pittsburg in 1893-1897, but was compelled to seek a warmer clime owing to a severe attack of lumbago and had to go to St. Augustine to recuperate.

At that time Dr. J. N. MacGonigle was pastor of the Flagler Memorial Church in St. Augustine, which had been erected by Mr. H. M. Flagler in memory of his late daughter. The doctor was also from the Pittsburg district. He advised Dr. Faris that if his health did not improve he should try Miami, where the climate was delightful and the newly founded town would soon be an important and flourishing business centre and a good field of labor in church work.

Prostrated again with illness, Dr. Faris spent his summer in Mount Clemens in Michigan, but in October he determined to follow Dr. MacGonigle's advice and go to Miami.

Before taking this step, however, he wrote to Mr. Flagler, to whom, by the way, he was an entire stranger, stating that for health reasons he was compelled to live in the south, but owing to financial inability he was anxious to avoid paying rent, and asking if one of the lots set aside for the church would be available for the building of a \$300 shack, for the preacher proposed to be his own architect.

Mr. Flagler wrote promptly in reply a most courteous letter, stating that he thought he could do better for the preacher, that he had some cottages in course of construction and would ask the builder to reserve one. Mr. Flagler in his letter also stated that he was a Presbyterian, the son of a Presbyterian minister, but added that he had not "one drop of denominational blood in his veins," and had an idea that the Presbyterian Church in Miami might be a good deal of a myth, but that he hoped the people would appreciate the coming of Dr. Faris, for he felt sure if success came to the church, it would be by Dr. Faris' efforts. Dr. Faris accordingly came to

Miami, and as he says, "from that day nothing has been too good for me or my work. Mr. Flagler has been kindness itself to me, and so has his good wife."

After Dr. Faris had paid rent for a year, along came a cheque for \$500 from Mr. Flagler, and this covered the preacher's entire outlay twice over. When the church was erected Mr. Flagler handed the keys over to the pastor personally, and even for the two years when again Dr. Faris went north, supposing that he had recovered his health—for recovery meant permanent residence in Illinois—the buildings remained in Dr. Faris' charge and were cared for by his son-in-law, who lived in the manse, and looked after the church during his absence.

Dr. Faris came first in 1897, and was in Miami until 1901, when he went to Illinois to friends at Anna, and then in 1903 he returned to Miami, for he found that residence in the northern air was not advisable.

Mr. Flagler met him one day shortly after his arrival in the corridor of the Royal Palm Hotel and gave him a most hearty greeting, saying: "I am glad to see you, sorry you ever went away—yes, I am glad to see you back, and hope you will never go away again."

Dr. Faris, of course, felt deeply gratified at the kindly welcome, and expressed thanks for Mr. Flagler's past kindness. As he was about to leave the hotel, Mr. Flagler said: "Faris, how much do these people of yours give you? Whatever it is I will add \$500 every year if you will stay. Now, don't say a word, but think my proposition over and come along with me and meet Mrs. Flagler." The doctor did so, and had a conversation that very much encouraged him in connection with his future work.

The result was that within sixty days the congregation called Dr. Faris at \$1,000 a year, which Mr. Flagler has personally paid, which the congregation, not a rich one, supplements with about \$300 per year.

Dr. Faris, in a sermon on the tenth anniversary of the church two years ago—a sermon which I had the pleasure of hearing—told the story of how the church came to be built. I should state that in the sermon the doctor said that during the early days of the congregation, when it numbered about ten or twelve members, the services were held in a small tent, erected on the corner of Fourteenth street and Avenue D, a shelter just large enough to hold the preacher, the congregation and

a lady who kindly volunteered, with the aid of a small melodeon, to lead the congregation in singing.

The story of the church building is an interesting one, for great results have followed the liberality of the benefactor, who has so generously aided Presbyterian work in this southern point of the great American union.

The other day I asked Dr. Faris, whose acquaintance I had the pleasure of making during my visit of last winter, to tell me the story as he gave it from the pulpit during my annual visit of two years ago. Dr. Faris said: "I was living in one of the Flagler cottages on Fourteenth street, off the Royal Palm Park. The tourist season of 1898 had just closed, and with my family I had been off on a fishing excursion, accompanied by friends from the north. About six o'clock in the evening I came home in somewhat of a bedraggled condition after our day's sport on the water, and as I was about to go up the steps to my house, I saw Mr. MacDonald, Mr. Flagler's builder, at the corner of the park. Walking towards me, Mr. MacDonald said: 'Dr. Faris, Mr. Flagler'—whom I noticed standing on the northeast corner of Palm avenue and Twelfth street, just where the church stands—'wants to talk to you.' The park, I may say, had just been staked out, nothing on it but sand, dirt and no shrubbery and trees. When I walked to the corner I found Mr. MacDonald, his son-in-law, and Mr. Reilly, the first Mayor, talking to Mr. Flagler. These gentlemen had built their private residences on the street which bounds the west side of the park, fully expecting that it would always be an open park, free from buildings.

"I observed as I walked along some small pine stakes set in a regular way at the northeast corner where the group were standing, and was very much puzzled to know what was doing, for I had not seen these stakes the day before. As soon as I had arrived at the corner Mr. Flagler greeted me with a friendly remark and said: 'Dr. Faris, I promised you a lot for your church on another site, on the corner of Avenue B and Eleventh street, didn't I?' 'Yes, Mr. Flagler, you did.' 'Well,' said he, 'how would you like me to make a change and build the church and the manse on this corner of the park?' I was taken quite aback at the offer, and said: 'Why, Mr. Flagler, I never dreamt of having a building on so fine a site as this.'

"'Well,' said Mr. Flagler, turning to his builder, 'Mac, show Dr. Faris where the church will stand, if it

is built on this lot.' Mr. MacDonald took me by the arm and walked me around the ground marked by the line of stakes, and as we came to the southeast corner, he said: 'Dr. Faris, this is where Mr. Flagler intends the manse will go, just south of the church,' and pointing to the spot, he said, 'you will see by the stakes where it will stand.' As we came back to the group, Mr. Flagler said: 'If we abandon the other lot two squares northwest of this (where the San Carlos Hotel now stands) we'll put the church a few feet in from the corner and the manse at the south, as shown you by Mac.' Knowing how the residents in the street west of the park would feel at having their view somewhat obstructed, I again said, 'Why, Mr. Flagler, I could not think of asking you for such a site.' 'Now,' said he, placing his hand on my shoulder, 'I did not tell you to ask for it, I merely asked you how you would like the change if I put the building here.' 'Put them here,' said I, 'there could not be anything finer.' Mr. Flagler then turned to Mr. MacDonald and said, 'Mac, see that the buildings are put up on this lot as staked, according to the architect's plans which you have.' About this time also he said, 'By the way, Dr. Faris, did I not promise to help your people out in this church construction?' 'Yes,' I said. 'You were good enough to speak of \$1,000 starting us with.' 'Yes,' said Mr. Flagler, 'I believe I did, but on second thoughts, you know second thoughts are sometimes best, I will erect the church and manse myself so that you and your people will not be bothered about it.' And it ended as Mr. Flagler planned, for the church and manse stand there to-day. The cost of the church and manse no one knows, for Mr. Flagler has never told anybody, but it looks like a \$50,000 or \$60,000 proposition."

This is the story of how a lad born in January, 1830, the son of a poor Presbyterian preacher in a little town in northern New York, left his home at fourteen years of age to seek his fortune, some of the results of which are the church and manse at Miami and other structures, the fruit of his generous heart and desire to help the work of Christianity.

And now you have the story of how the First Presbyterian Church was built in Miami—a story told for the first time in printed words.

*HOTEL ROYAL PALM,
Miami, Florida,
March 5th, 1909.*

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